

## DJCS FORMING VALUABLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR CRIME AND JUSTICE RESEARCH

It is evident to those of us who work in the criminal justice arena that West Virginia, like many other states, needs to enhance, improve and expand research and evaluation activities on crime and justice issues. Although our state boasts a low crime rate and one of the nation's lowest recidivism rates, we still face challenges involving victimization, juvenile delinquency, prison overcrowding, minority overrepresentation and gender disparities, to mention a few.

In order to address these concerns, criminologists and social science professionals must conduct research that will help inform and guide criminal justice policy and practice in our state. This not only requires collaboration among various industry professionals, but also outside support and dependable funding sources.

Fortunately, the Office of Research and Strategic Planning (ORSP) within the Division of Justice and Community Services (DJCS) recently created an investigator-initiated research grant program as part of the Criminal Justice Statistical Analysis Center (CJSAC). The goal of the program is to improve research and evaluation activities within the state by making funds available for researchers and by fostering partnerships between the DJCSAC, universities and other stakeholders.

Dr. Stephen Haas, Director of the ORSP, sees a natural link between research and good policy development and university partnerships. "Having been a university professor and researcher for many years myself, it seems like a natural thing to have such partnerships," he said.

Studies produced through these partnerships in the past have examined subject matter ranging from inmate reentry to all terrain vehicle deaths and injuries, to gun availability and crime. Contributors to the research have included our own premier universities of Marshall and WVU, as well as out of state schools such as Kent State and federal government agencies such as the FBI.

The most recently published article, produced by Dr. Stephen Haas and Jessica Napier, also of the CJSAC,

along with Dr. James Nolan of WVU, was titled *Estimating the Impact of Classification Error on the Statistical Accuracy of Uniform Crime Reports*. The article appears in online and print editions of the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, one of several industry publications that have previously featured CJSAC research and has already yielded results by leading to new methodology for exploring the accuracy of crime statistics.

Dr. Haas said, "It is anticipated this study will improve officer training and lead to advanced techniques for adjusting crime statistics so they more accurately reflect the true volume of crimes and victimizations. A more accurate picture of crime and crime trends can be invaluable for helping us better evaluate our response and prevention efforts."

Other research conducted by the CJSAC and their partners has received national recognition and effected changes in state law, and studies currently underway are expected to continue to impact criminology literature and policy. Some of those current projects include topics such as life-course trends in sexual and nonsexual victimization; assessing the accuracy of hate crime reporting; and differences in the delivery of services across correctional settings.

Norbert Federspiel, Director of the Division of Justice and Community Services, urges industry professionals to recognize the importance of these studies, saying, "Research doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is important that research is relevant to the operational needs of the criminal justice system in West Virginia. Areas of research that could be explored should be brought to the attention of the Division and the ORSP."

This is an exciting time for the division and for everyone involved, as they have only scratched the surface of what these relationships could accomplish.

Dr. Haas says, "Establishing and building upon collaborative relationships with university researchers has many benefits for a state planning agency and research center such as the ORSP. It is important that our policies are rooted in evidence, and university partners are essential for helping us stay connected to the science."

To view CJSAC publications visit [www.djcs.wv.gov](http://www.djcs.wv.gov).